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Colonial Birth, Nationalist Growth

Influence of the Colonial Rule and Education System on the Novels of India and Bangladesh

Md. Mamunur Rahman

1. Introduction

This paper seeks to explain the influence of the British colonial rule and education on the novels of India and Bangladesh.¹ Several important and successive events at the turn of the nineteenth century accounted for the rise of the novel in colonial India. The introduction of the printing press by the missionaries in 1800 and the establishment of Fort William College in Calcutta in the same year facilitated the publication of textbooks and the development of vernacular prose.² With the official introduction and institutionalization of English education in the subsequent years, the English-educated Indian people came in contact with English literature.³ Some of them started to use prose as a tool for creative writing, imitating the English model. This paper argues that, although the Indian novel was born out of the influence of colonial education, it did not always abide by the colonial cultural assumptions, rather the novelists of India and Bangladesh expressed their own vision regarding the past, present and future of their country. This paper looks at certain key moments in the history of the colonial rule in the Indian subcontinent and analyzes some representative novels, written in either vernacular or English, to examine how the novelists of India and Bangladesh attempted to subvert the colonialist perspective, foreground their own cultural experiences, and depict the nationalist urge and struggle of the Indian people for freedom from the colonial rule.

2. Indian historical novel and nascent nationalism

The origin of the Indian novel in its rudimentary form started with the imitation or adoption of English novels by the educated Indians who had read them usually as part of their syllabus in schools,

¹ In this paper, the generic term ‘the Indian novel’ or ‘the Indian novelists’ applies to the novels or novelists of both India and Bangladesh, as Bangladesh was the eastern part of the Bengal province under British India divided in 1947. ‘Bengali novel’ is used as a common term for the novels of both the West Bengal and Bangladesh, the then East Bengal.

² There was no significant written prose in the Indian languages. See Krishna Kripalani. “Modern Literature”. Ed. A. L. Basham. *A Cultural History of India* (New Delhi: OUP, 1975), pp. 408-411.

³ Gauri Viwanathan, in her *Masks of Conquest: Literary Study and British Rule in Colonial India* (New York, Columbia UP, 1989) has extensively discussed the relation between the colonial ideology and the actual introduction of English education as an academic discipline in colonial India.

colleges or universities.⁴ Marathi novel *Yamuna Paryatan* (Yamuna's Pilgrimage, 1857) by Baba Padmanji, which was an imitation of *The Pilgrim's Progress*, can be cited as an example. In their attempt to write novels, Indian writers were often patronized by the English ruling class. The Gujrati writer Nanshankar Mehta wrote his novel *Karana Ghelo* (1866) after being inspired by Mr. Russel, the then education inspector of Surat.⁵ Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay (1838-1894) is regarded as the father of modern Bengali or Indian novel. He was also the first practitioner of English novel in India, writing *Rajmohan's Wife* in 1864. He was one of the first graduates of Calcutta University and belonged to the first generation of the Calcutta-centred middle-class who appreciated colonial education. Bankimchandra was seriously indebted to Walter Scott, Wilke Collins and Bulwar Lytton. He brought the complexity of characterization and plot construction in his historical novel *Durgeshnandini* (Daughter of the Feudal Lord, 1865), which is considered as the first Bengali or Indian novel in the modern sense of the term. The novel was modeled on Scott's *Ivanhoe*. Malayalam novel *Marthanda Verma* (1891) by C. V. Raman Pillai closely followed Scott's tradition. Scott's influence can also be traced in the novels of the Hindi writer Kishorilal Goswami (1865-1932), the Marathi writer Hari Narayan Apte (1864-1919), and the Kannada writer Venkatachar (1845-1914).

However, in Bengal, and later in other parts of India, the rise of novel coincided with the rise of nationalism. Most of the Indian novelists belonged to the middle class, having colonial education, which itself largely accounted for their nationalistic feelings.⁶ English education helped to create a homogenous and secular outlook among the middle-class people who were otherwise divided by region, language, caste and religion. Ideas like patriotism and love of liberty were developed in them by the impact of English education, which also helped them to be familiar with the strong current of nationalism in Europe – in Greece, Italy and Ireland. While colonial education tended to make them admirers of the colonial culture and institutions, they remained aware of their secondary status as colonized subjects. As a result, they suffered from an identity crisis and, to overcome this crisis, they attempted to retrieve the richness and glory of their own tradition and culture. They imitated colonial literary form but assimilated it with their native tradition, producing hybrid text. In other words, colonial literary form was subverted by imitation. In spite of being born out of the English influence, Indian historical novels had close resemblance to the forms of Indian oral tradition, which highlighted royal splendor, heroism and sensational elements.⁷ Moreover, the Indian novelists used the colonial genre to express their own vision and expectation. Thus, in Bankimchandra's first novel *Durgeshnandini*, "the spirit was indigenous and the inspiration by and large patriotic."⁸ In writing

⁴ Harish Trivedy. *Colonial Transactions: English Literature and India* (Calcutta: Papyrus, 1993), p. 209.

⁵ See Meenaskhi Mukherjee. *Realism and Reality: The Novel and Society in India* (New Delhi: Oxford India Paperback), p. 14. Mukherjee presents many such examples of patronage by the colonial officials.

⁶ See Elleke Boehmer, *Colonial and Postcolonial Literature* (Oxford & New York: OUP, 1995) pp. 115-121.

⁷ See Mukherjee. p. 45.

⁸ S L Ghosh. "An Introduction to Modern Bengali Fiction." *Indian Literature*, vol. 12, No. 3 (New Delhi:

historical novel, the Hindu writers' attention was often directed towards the glorification of Hindu history and culture, while the Muslim writers brought back the past histories of the Muslim world. Mir Mosharraf Hossain's popular novel *Bishad Sindhu* (Ocean of Sorrow, 1885-1891), which was the rewriting of the tragic history of Karbala, bears testimony to the novelist's "political sensitivity and desire to use his narrative to articulate his beliefs about good and bad governments and the limits of freedom in colonial Bengal."⁹

The early Indian novelists opted for historical novel, finding it as a fit vehicle to express their newly awakened nationalistic feelings. They had to write under the strict censorship of the colonial government. The remote setting of the historical novel gave them the much-needed literary freedom to create characters with individuality. Again, by writing historical novels, the Indian novelists could evoke a past full of happiness and heroism, in contrast to the servile existence in the then colonial condition. Interestingly, in their efforts to write historical novels, they were benefited from the publication of English books on Indian history written by the English writers, such as Grant Duff's *The History of the Marathas* (1826). They took hints of the heroism of Indian people from these books – for example, the heroism of the Marathas and the Rajputs – and used them as materials of their novels to highlight the heroic past of India.

Bankimchandra wrote the novel *Anandamath* (The Abbey of Bliss, 1882) with the aim of making Bengali people aware of their past greatness so that they could shake off their present subservient position. He consciously chose the historical record of the Sanyasi Rebellion (Rebellion of the Hindu ascetics) which took place in 1770s. Bankimchandra got the clues about this event from Gleig's *Memoirs of the Life of Warren Hastings* and W. W. Hunter's *Annals of Rural Bengal*, yet he intentionally rewrote the fact of the Sanyasi Rebellion to valorize the past. The novel relates the event in which the Sanyasi rebels defeat the combined forces of the British and the Muslims. *Anandamath*, besides being a historical novel, is also a political novel in its embryonic form, in which the novelist provided, "a blue print, as it were, for the revolutionary organizations to be born in the next century."¹⁰ The novel revealed the aspiration of the Indian people to live in a free India. It contained the famous song 'Bande Mataram' (Hail Mother) which became a source of inspiration for the Indian nationalists in the subsequent anti-colonial movements.

However, in *Anandamath*, Bankimchandra exhibits an ambivalent attitude towards the British rule. He shows the victory of the rebels, but at the end of the novel he suggests that they should submit to the British rule and embrace English education to prepare themselves for self-rule. Bankimchandra and his contemporary novelists belonged to the early phase of the nationalist writers

Sahitya Akademi, Sep. 1969), p. 73.

⁹ Fakrul Alam, "Mir Mosharraf Hossain's Shaping of the Ocean of Sorrow." *The Asian Age*. 07 Sep. 2017. <https://dailyasianage.com/news/84014/mir-mosharraf-hossains-shaping-of-ocean-of-sorrow>.

¹⁰ Sishir Kumar Das. *A History of Indian Literature 1911-1956: Struggle for Freedom: Triumph and Tragedy* (New Delhi: Sahitya Akademi, 1995, Rpt. 2006), p. 70.

in India who used to glorify their indigenous cultural heritage and even attack the existing colonial system, yet remained confined within the external control of the colonial ruling class and the colonial ideology indoctrinated to them through their colonial education. Therefore, the potential for subversion was not fully realized in their novels.¹¹

3. The Indian novel as a vehicle of social reform

Colonial education “set up a high standard of rational thinking, leading to religious and social reforms which regenerated the whole India.”¹² Resultantly, the English-educated Indian people took lead in rectifying abusive social practices, such as harsh treatment of widow and polygamy. The colonial rulers also intervened to stop some of these practices – the Hindu Widow’s Remarriage Act, passed in 1856, is a glaring example. It is seen that “the early pioneers in almost all Indian literatures were also active social reformers and men of outstanding moral stature.”¹³ Thus the zeal for reform got manifested in the Indian novel from its early phase, as is evident in the treatment of the themes of female emancipation and widow remarriage.

In treating the issues of social reform, initially the Indian novelists had to keep in mind the pressure of the rigid social and religious tradition; the reforming spirit got more assertive only gradually. A comparative study of the representation of widow by Bankimchandra and Rabindranath Tagore (1861-1941), who came to the literary scene a generation later, seems to shed light on this matter. The central theme of Bankimchandra’s two novels, *Vishabriksha* (The Poison Tree, 1872-73) and *Krishnakanter Will* (1878), is widowhood. Rabindranath Tagore acknowledged his debt to Bankimchandra’s novel *Vishabriksha* in treating the theme of widowhood in his own novel *Chokher Bali* (The Eyesore, 1902). The story of *Vishabriksha* tells the love affair of Kunda, a beautiful young widow and Nagendra, a young landlord, which finally ends in Kunda’s suicide. Despite evoking sympathy for the miserable life of the widows, Bankimchandra condemns widow remarriage as a source of social disquiet. To quote Sudhir Chandra:

He seems to have been torn between the urges of a sensitive artist and a stern moralist; both operated in the colonial milieu that affected the social change. From this uncertainty he sought release by tilting the balance in favour of a moralist position. He worried that the creative writer in him would get the better of his moralist position and create a social impact damaging to the social fabric.¹⁴

¹¹ See Bill Ashcroft, Garreth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin. *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-colonial Literatures*. (London and New York: Routledge, 1994), p. 6.

¹² R. C. Majumdar, *History of the Freedom Movement in India* Vol.1 (Calcutta: Firma KLM Private Limited, 1988), p. 259.

¹³ Krishna Kripalani, p. 412.

¹⁴ Sudhir Chandra, *The Oppressive Present: Literature and Social Consciousness in Colonial India* (New Delhi, OUP, 1992, rpt.1999), p. 101.

Unlike Kunda, the widow Binodini in Rabindranath Tagore's novel *Chokher Bali* plays an active role in resisting the romantic approach of Mahendra while showing attraction to Behari. Her failure to marry Behari indicates how she is viewed by the contemporary society, yet, "Refusing to either condemn or idealize, Rabindranath Tagore depicts Binodini, the widow in *Chokher Bali*, with care and respect."¹⁵ Thus the treatment of widow by Bankimchandra and then by Rabindranath Tagore is an indication that the society was gradually moving towards favouring the position of widows.

The novelistic urge towards social reform is also evident in the first significant Malayalam novel *Indulekha* (1889) by O Chandu Menon. The novel originated out of Menon's attempt to translate Disraeli's *Henrietta Temple*, yet it finally emerged as an original work, becoming a trendsetter in Malayalam novel. A blend of the western form of realistic novel and local literary tradition, the novel revolves around the heroine Indulekha. Having acquired modern outlook through English education, she resists the decision of her guardians who arrange her marriage with an old man. The theme of the necessity of English education is woven into the very texture of the novel: "This forms the crux of the narrative – learning English – showing up over and over, building layers of meaning to the story and thereby reflecting the impact a language has on a society."¹⁶ *Indulekha* and C. V. Raman Pillai's *Marthanda Varma* (1891) are "the local manifestations of a spirit of pan-India Renaissance."¹⁷

4. The Indian novel and the anti-colonial movement

In the early twentieth century, the educated middle class in India felt increasingly dissatisfied with the discriminatory colonial policy. The Montagu-Chelmsford Reform (1919) denied them the political power they were promised as a reward for assisting the British in the First World War. On the contrary, the colonial rulers passed the repressive Rowlatt Act, while their army committed the Jallianwalla Bagh massacre, killing hundreds of unarmed civilians. During this time, the anti-colonial nationalist movement got momentum under the influence of Mahatma Gandhi who, like his fellow nationalist leaders, such as Jawaharlal Nehru, Subhas Chandra Bose and Mohammad Ali Jinnah, had studied in England, getting much insight into the ideas of nationalism and political freedom. The Indian novel also began to evince the nationalist spirit of the period. Thus even "behind apparently apolitical and poetic-spiritual works" of Rabindranath Tagore there was "a complex awareness of such explicitly political categories as nationalism, internationalism and imperialism."¹⁸ In his famous essay, *Nationalism*, he advocated a shift from nationalism to

¹⁵ Sudhir Chandra. p. 114.

¹⁶ *Indulekha* the Novel: First Major Novel in Malayalam. 30 Mar. 2018. <https://malayalamproject.wordpress.com/indulekha/>.

¹⁷ Ayaappa Panikar, Int. to *Mathanda Varma*. Trans. B. K. Menon (New Delhi: Sahitya Academy, 1998), p. 21.

¹⁸ See Harish Trivedy. pp. 15-20.

internationalism by bridging the gap between the East and the West.¹⁹ Rabindranath Tagore was critical of some unpopular measures taken by the colonial government, for instance, the Sedition Bill of 1898 and the partition of Bengal in 1905. He renounced his Knighthood in protest against the Jallianwalla Bagh massacre. His novels *Gora*, *Ghore Baire* and *Char Adhyay* deal with “the intricate themes of nation building and modernity in a colonial context.”²⁰

While *Gora* (1910) was written against the backdrop of the partition of Bengal, it recounts another important event in the history of the British rule in India: the Sepoy Uprising of 1857, which is often called India’s first war of independence.²¹ During the uprising, Gora’s English father is killed and his Irish mother takes shelter in the house of a Hindu family, where she dies after giving birth to Gora. He grows up under the care of his foster parents Krishnadayal and Anandamoyi. The character of Gora epitomizes the crisis of the period centered on the social upheavals in Bengal caused by the conflict between the reformists and the orthodox. Gora, a university graduate, turns into a zealot for orthodox Hinduism. Eventually, he loses the sympathy of his foster father, yet he is sustained by his foster mother Anandamoyi, Rabindranath Tagore’s symbol of liberated woman. The novel ends with Gora’s marriage with Sucharita and his declaration that “Today I am really an Indian, in me there is no longer any opposition between Hindu, Mussulman, and Christian. Today every caste is my caste, the food of all is my food.”²² Rabindranath Tagore presents Anandamoyi as the image of India itself, who can accept and absorb all opposing forces to fuse them into a unifying entity. As Nikky Singh explains:

The 1905 division of Bengal under Lord Curzon may have heightened Tagore’s perception of a unified topography. He was hurt to witness the conflict between Hindus and Muslims, whetted by the British administration in its divide-and-rule policy. The pain of his home province ripped asunder into East and West must have been acutely felt during the writing of *Gora*.²³

Thus, the novel, *Gora*, becomes “an epic of modern Bengal, even modern India.”²⁴

The *swadeshi* (made in India) movement against the partition of Bengal formed the background of Rabindranath Tagore’s novel *Ghore Baire* (1916) translated as *The Home and the*

¹⁹ See Rabindranath Tagore. *Nationalism* (London: Macmillan and Co. Limited, Rpt. 1918), p. 6.

²⁰ Dasgupta, Chakravarti and Mathew, *Radical Rabindranath: Nation, Family and Gender in Tagore’s Fiction and Films* (New Delhi: Orient Blackswan Private Limited, 2013), p. 183.

²¹ Although the colonial rulers termed it as ‘Sepoy Mutiny’, the Indian nationalists considered it as a war of independence. See Vinayak Damodar Savarkar, *The Indian War of Independence of 1857* [London : s.n., 1909] Electronic reproduction. New York: Columbia University Libraries, 2007.

²² Rabindranath Tagore (1910), *Gora* (New Delhi: Rupa Publications India Pvt. Ltd., 2002), p. 568.

²³ Nikky Singh, “Infigurations and Configurations of India: Anandamoyi in Tagore’s *Gora*”. *Journal of South Asian Literature* Vol. 31/32, No. 1/2 (Michigan State University, 1996/1997), p. 4.

²⁴ Dasgupta, Chakravarti and Mathew. p. 172.

World. The Bengal province was divided apparently to bring about efficiency and dynamism in administration, although recent research has uncovered the colonial motive of ‘divide and rule’ aimed at weakening the influence of the educated Bengalis.²⁵ Rabindranath Tagore initially supported the movement but later withdrew from it, blaming its violent nature. *Ghore Baire* dramatizes the conflict between Nikhilesh, a benevolent and educated landlord and his friend Sandip who is a *swadeshi* leader. While Sandip is a pragmatist, to whom end justifies the means, Nikhilesh does not support violence to force people to abjure foreign goods. Forcible boycott of foreign goods, cheaper than the indigenous ones, adversely affects the lives of the poor Muslim subjects, generating a communal riot. In the long run, Sandip fails to achieve his end and retreats. The political message of the novel anticipates Mahatma Gandhi’s philosophy of non-violent means of political action along with the idea that “evil means must vitiate the end, however nobly conceived.”²⁶ In this novel, the question of the position of women in modern India is quite intertwined with the theme of nationalism. Nikhilesh wants her wife Bimala to be a ‘modern’ woman and arranges English education for her. Bimala, however, feels attracted to her husband’s friend Sandip only to be disillusioned later with his perverse policy. Bimala in her innocence is the symbol of India, her relationship with Sandip is Rabindranath Tagore’s warning of the danger of extremism and violence in the name of *swadeshi*.

The issue of female emancipation also comes to the spotlight in the novels of Sharat Chandra Chattopadhyay, one of the most popular novelists in Bengali literature. His “zeal for advancing women’s rights was nothing short of the social thinker and political activist.”²⁷ Sarat Chandra Chattopadhyay particularly deals with the condition of the oppressed women trying desperately to find a space in the margin of the society. For instance, both the characters of Achala in the novel *Grihadaha* (House of Cinders, 1919) and Sabitri in *Srikanta* (1917-1933) violate the social obligation of being loyal to the husband. Like Sabitri, the heroine of *Padmarag* (1927), written by the first Bengali Muslim feminist novelist Begum Roquia Shakhawat Hossain, rejects her polygamous husband.²⁸

Sarat Chandra Chattopadhyay’s novel *Pather Dabi* (The Right of Way, 1926), which was banned by the colonial government, focuses on the secret movement against the British rule. Although Gandhi’s approach to the struggle for freedom was non-violent, many secret organizations fanned out especially in Bengal, which sought to free the country from the colonial rule by violence – Subhas Chandra Bose was the iconic figure of this armed resistance. In his letter to Rabindranath Tagore, Sharat Chandra Chattopadhyay stated that his intention of writing the novel *Pather Dabi* was to make the reader disenchanted with the British government, because “throughout India, large

²⁵ See Dasgupta, Chakravarti and Mathew. P. 144-45, and Nalini Natarajan (ed.), *Handbook of Twentieth Century Literature of India* (Westport and London: Greenwood Press, 1996), p. 67.

²⁶ Krishna Kripalani, qtd. in K. R. Srinivasa Iyengar, *Indian Writing in English* (New Delhi: Sterling Publishing Private Limited, rpt. 2000), p. 107.

²⁷ Nalini Natarajan (ed.). p. 49.

²⁸ See *Banglapedia: National Encyclopedia of Bangladesh*. p. 422.

numbers of people are being imprisoned or extorted by the government on flimsy grounds without trial or in flagrant miscarriage of justice.”²⁹

While Indian novelists, since the beginning of the 1920s, were intellectually, and often directly, involved in the anti-colonial movement, they were also preoccupied with the idea of humanism, social justice and economic equity. The Bengali novelists, including those of the Kallol group,³⁰ were influenced by the contemporary literary movement in the West, which itself was a product of post-war disillusionment. Thus Bibhuti Bhushan Bandyopadhyay (1899-1950), who had a deep understanding of the relation between life and nature, Tarashankar Bandyopadhyay (1898–1971), who was arrested for taking part in the nationalist movement, and Manik Bandyopadhyay (1908-1956), who showed allegiance to the Marxist principle, portrayed the social effect of the colonial rule in rural Bengal. Kazi Nazrul Islam (1899-1976), who, like Rabindranath Tagore, was primarily a poet and is popularly known in Bangladesh as the rebel poet, wrote three novels – *Bandhanhara* (1927), *Mrityuksudha* (1930) and *Kuhelika* (1931) “all written against the backdrop of the freedom struggle.”³¹

During the 1930s, when Gandhian freedom movement got intensified in the form of civil disobedience, political theme dominated many Indian novels. However, as social reform was an integral part of Gandhi’s conception of self-rule, the Indian novelists paid their attention to the topics of caste, class and gender. The influence of Gandhi is visibly present in the novels of the three pioneers of Indian Fiction in English – Mulk Raj Anand, Raja Rao and R. K. Narayan. Anand and Rao visited Europe and their writings had been influenced by their education there. Narayan also admitted in an interview: “My whole education has been in English from the primary school, and most of my reading has been in the English language . . . I wrote in English because it came to me very easily.”³² Although these writers used English language and literary form, in their case, “the thoughts and feelings, the stirrings of the soul, the wayward movements of the consciousness, are all of the soil of India.”³³

Mulk Raj Anand, much influenced by Marxist humanism, detailed the wretched condition of the poor and oppressed people. In his novel *Untouchable* (1935), the protagonist Bakha belongs to the neglected untouchable caste and, as such, considers Mahatma Gandhi as a saviour of his class in the caste-ridden society of India: “The Mahatma seemed to have touched the most intimate corner of his soul. ‘Surely he is a good man,’ Bakha said.”³⁴ Like Mulk Raj Anand, Hindi novelist Premchand,

²⁹ “When a Bengali Novel Became a Threat to the British Empire.” 23, Apr, 2018. <https://sabrangindia.in/article/when-bengali-novel-became-threat-british-empire>.

³⁰ One of the most influential groups in Bengali literature named after a literary magazine of the same name, spanning between 1923 and 1935. The group included Premendra Mitra, Buddhadev Basu, Kazi Nazrul Islam and many others.

³¹ *Banglapedia: National Encyclopedia of Bangladesh*. p. 422.

³² Qtd. in Sundaram, P. S. R. *K. Narayan as a Novelist* (Delhi: B R Publishing Corporations, 1988), p. 8.

³³ K. R. Srinivas Iyengar, *Indian Writing in English* (New Delhi: Sterling Publishing Private Limited. Rpt. 2000), 359.

³⁴ Mulk Raj Anand (1935), *Untouchable* (London: Penguin Books, 1940), p. 149.

who, inspired by Mahatma Gandhi, resigned from the colonial government service, dealt with the 'subaltern' or the downtrodden people. While his earlier novels concentrated on Gandhi's view that the colonial economic structure was the source of the misery of the peasants, his last novel *Godan* (The Gift of a Cow, 1936) penetrated deeper into the reality of the village life to express the idea that the suffering of the peasants originated not only from the colonial economic structure but also from the very social structure facilitating exploitation by the village heads, priests and money lenders. *Godan* marks Premchand's shift from Gandhi's spiritual approach to Nehru's socialist approach in dealing with the problems of the people at the periphery.³⁵ Raja Rao, on the other hand, elevated the Gandhian movement to a mythological height. His novel *Kanthapura* delineates the South Indian society which becomes greatly influenced by Gandhi's Non-violent Movement. The protagonist Moorthy is the incarnation of Gandhi, who carries out Gandhi's values of self-rule and non-violence. In *Kanthapura*, Raja Rao blends English tradition of novel with Indian story-telling tradition; this narrative technique "makes the novel more a *Gandhi Purana* than a piece of mere fiction."³⁶

R. K. Narayan's early novels *Swami and Friends* (1935), *The Bachelor of Arts* (1937) and *The English Teacher* (1945) constitute "something of a *bildungsroman* of a colonial upbringing where we witness consistently ambivalent responses to induction into the colonizer's culture."³⁷ *The Bachelor of Arts* points out the tension looming large over India because of the anti-colonial movement against the British rule. In *The English Teacher*, Narayan questions the very relevance of English education in India; the protagonist Krishna does not find any reason for which the Indian students should "mug up Shakespeare and Milton." Narayan's *Waiting for the Mahatma* (1955), like Bhabani Bhattacharya's *So Many Hungers* (1947) and Aamir Ali's *Conflict* (1947), is based on the Quit India Movement of 1942 aimed at ousting the colonial rulers from India.

Among the Bengali novels, *Jagari* (The Vigil, 1945) by Satinath Bhaduri also focuses on the last phase of the Quit India Movement. The action of the novel takes place in one night in 1943, when Bilu is waiting to be hanged for his family's involvement in Gandhi's movement. In this way, the novel draws attention to the immense human suffering and sacrifice that constituted the movement to oust the British from India.

The nationalistic fervour which characterized Indian fiction in the 30s and 40s, continued to feature in the novels of the post-independence India, "viewed from a fresh angle from the vantage ground of freedom."³⁸ The partition of the Indian subcontinent into India and Pakistan in 1947 left

³⁵ See Michael Sprinker, "Marxism and Nationalism: Ideology and Class Struggle in Premchand's *Godan*," *Social Text* No. 23 (Autumn - Winter, 1989), pp. 59-82. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/466421>.

³⁶ Dr. R. Prabhakar, "Gandhi's Ideology-Raja Rao-Moorthy in *Kanthapura*," *International Journal of Research-Granthaalayah*, Vol. 4, No. 2. (2016): 87- 94. 17 Apr, 2018. http://granthaalayah.com/Articles/Vol4Iss2/10_IJRG16_A02_57.pdf. 'Purana' means sacred writings on Hindu mythology.

³⁷ Fakrul Alam, "Reading R. K. Narayan Postcolonially," *Panini: NSU Studies in Language and Literature*, Vol. 1, 2002. p. 33.

³⁸ M. K. Naik, *Dimensions of Indian English Literature* (New Delhi: Sterling Publishers, 1984), p. 110.

in its trail “an unprecedented holocaust of communal frenzy,”³⁹ resulting in mass migration, murder, rape and abduction. Khushwant Singh’s *Train to Pakistan* (1956) is an objective portrayal of the violence and brutality associated with the partition. The novel is set in a remote village where Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs have been living in peace and harmony for centuries, yet the rumor of communal violence elsewhere impacts on their mutual trusts. The Sikh hooligans attempt to rampage a train carrying Muslim refugees to Pakistan, and the massacre is avoided only by the supreme sacrifice of a Sikh young man who loves a Muslim girl. The novel aptly captures the human tragedy unleashed by the British colonial process of partition. Amitav Ghosh’s *The Shadow Lines* (1988), written almost four decades after the partition, is a stark reminder of the effect of dislocation on the victims. In this novel, the narrator’s grandmother Tha’mma, who was forced to migrate from Dhaka to Calcutta in 1947, feels disoriented when she requires passport and visa to visit her ancestral home in old Dhaka. During her Dhaka visit, a communal riot ensues, killing Tridib, Tha’mma’s nephew, and Khalil, a Muslim Rickshaw-puller. The novel echoes the same message of Khushwant Singh – the partition was a political event and the general people have been the victim of history and politics against their will.

5. Conclusion

The novelists of India and Bangladesh mastered the art of novel from the English model provided to them through their colonial education, but from the very beginning they used it as a vehicle to express the national aspiration of the people. At the early stage, the Indian novel revealed how the Indian people were adjusting to the colonial rule, in which resentment and rebellion were coupled with admiration of some aspects of British rule, such as English education, language and institutions. It also depicted the ongoing social, political and institutional reforms encouraged by the colonial rule and education, paving the way for broader national integration. Afterwards, the Indian novel became overtly anti-colonial, portraying Indian struggle for freedom from the colonial rule. The Indian novel got impetus from the nationalist movement and, in its turn, inspired that movement. In the context of India and Bangladesh, the novel, which was originally a gift from colonial education, ironically became a tool for anti-colonial nationalist struggle.

³⁹ Raddhika Chopra, “Partition Lives in Khushwant Singh’s *Train to Pakistan* and Manju Kapur’s *Difficult Daughters*, Indian Literature, Vol. 54, No. 3, 257, (Sahitya Akademi, May/June 2010), p. 165. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23349470>.